

# AM Genesis 18:1-21

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[ 0 : 0 0 ]     Now some of you may have been here when I was preaching in February, I think it was, and we looked at the first part of Genesis chapter 18, the first 15 verses.

And I want this morning to look at the next part, and I chose this because I think it relates particularly to baptism, and we're going to have the baptism of Lydia later on in the service.

So our focus will be on 16 to 21, but just to kind of set the context, I'm going to read the whole, well not the whole chapter, but from the beginning of Genesis 18 to verse 21.

And just to set the wider context, Genesis is the first book in the Bible, so it begins with the account of God creating the universe, including human beings, and God creating everything good.

And as the narrative goes on, the first human beings, they rebel against God, and that affects every relationship.

[ 1 : 0 9 ]     It affects their relationship with God, their relationship with each other, their relationship with the world that God has made, the environment. And even within themselves, there is a broken relationship, ultimately expressed in the separation of body and soul in death.

The story proceeds with increasing violence and corruption, and then God destroys the world with a flood.

But from that he saves Noah and his family. And then after the flood from Noah and his family, there developed many peoples and nations and languages. And then God brings from all of those one man, this man Abraham.

And in Genesis 12, we read that the Lord had said to Abraham, Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you.

And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonours you, I will curse.

[ 2 : 1 7 ]     And in you, all the families of the earth shall be blessed. Blessed. And Abraham obeys the Lord and goes to the land that the Lord shows him, the land of Canaan.

And God, over the next few chapters and over many years, appears again to Abraham and speaks to him on various occasions. We're taking up the reading in chapter 18, verse 1.

And the Lord appeared to Abraham by the oaks of Mamre, as he sat at the door of his tent in the heat of the day.

He lifted up his eyes and looked, and behold, three men were standing in front of him. When he saw them, he ran from the tent door to meet them, and bowed himself to the earth, and said, O Lord, if I have found favour in your sight, do not pass by your servant.

Let a little water be brought, and wash your feet, and rest yourselves under the tree, while I bring a morsel of bread, that you may refresh yourselves, and after that you may pass on, since you have come to your servant.

[ 3 : 26 ] So they said, Do as you have said. And Abraham went quickly into the tent to Sarah, and said, Quick, three sears of fine flour, knead it to make cakes.

And Abraham ran to the herd, and took a calf, tender and good, and gave it to a young man, who prepared it quickly. Then he took curds and milk, and the calf that he had prepared, and set it before them.

And he stood by them under the tree, while they ate. They said to him, Where is Sarah, your wife? And he said, She's in the tent. The Lord said, I will surely return to you about this time next year, and Sarah, your wife, shall have a son.

And Sarah was listening at the tent door behind him. Now Abraham and Sarah were old, advanced in years. The way of women had ceased to be with Sarah.

So Sarah laughed to herself, saying, After I am worn out, and my Lord is old, shall I have this pleasure? The Lord said to Abraham, Why did Sarah laugh, and say, Shall I indeed bear a child, now that I am old?

[ 4 : 37 ] Is anything too hard for the Lord? At the appointed time, I will return to you about this time next year, and Sarah shall have a son.

But Sarah denied it, saying, I did not laugh, for she was afraid. He said, No, but you did laugh. Then the men set out from there, and they looked down towards Sodom.

And Abraham went with them to set them on their way. The Lord said, Shall I hide from Abraham what I am about to do? Seeing that Abraham shall surely become a great and mighty nation, and all nations of the earth shall be blessed in him.

For I have chosen him, that he may command his children and his household after him, to keep the way of the Lord, by doing righteousness and justice, so that the Lord may bring to Abraham what he has promised him.

Then the Lord said, Because the outcry against Sodom and Gomorrah is great, and their sin is very grave, I will go down to see whether they have done altogether according to the outcry that has come to me.

[ 6 : 03 ] And if not, I will know. May God bless to us that reading from his word. The passage that we read to Genesis 18, and looking at especially verses 16 to 21.

So that's on page 15 of the church Bible. So the context of this is that the Lord himself appearing to Abraham.

Abraham receives these three visitors, three men we're told, one of whom is identified as the Lord himself, and the other two later on as angels.

And this visit to Abraham and Sarah has two purposes. It's first of all to announce the birth of Isaac to Abraham and Sarah.

And then second, the visit is to bring judgment on Sodom and Gomorrah. And so in this visit of the Lord, we see this sort of twin purpose of God's work of judgment and salvation.

[ 7 : 17 ] And it's salvation because it's through Isaac, through Isaac's line of descent, through his offspring, that ultimately salvation would come, the Savior would come, who is the Messiah Jesus.

And this section that we're looking at connects with both of these themes, with judgment and salvation. So the scene here is these three visitors walking along.

They've had their meal, and Abraham is sending them on their way. He's walking along with them. From a height, they look down into the plain of the Jordan, and they see the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah below them.

And the one identified as the Lord says, in verse 16, shall I hide from Abraham what I'm about to do?

God is here taking Abraham into his confidence, revealing his plans to him. Three times later on in the Bible, Abraham is called the friend of God.

[ 8 : 32 ] And arguably more than any other passage, it's based on this passage, where God takes Abraham into his confidence and reveals to Abraham what he is planning to do.

And then God states the importance of Abraham, the centrality of Abraham, in God's own plan.

In verse 18, God says, seeing that Abraham will surely become a great and mighty nation, and all the nations of the earth shall be blessed in him.

Now this is the second of three times in the sort of narrative of Abraham that we have these words, or words very similar to this.

In fact, when we were looking, sort of introducing the passage, we read the first one in Genesis 12. Again, I'll read that. Then it's Genesis 12, two to three, where God calls Abraham to leave his homeland and to go to the place that he will show him.

[ 9 : 38 ] And then God promises, I will make of you, Abraham, a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonors you, I will curse.

And in you, all the families of the earth shall be blessed. And then, so, and then this in, in Genesis 18 is the second time, and then later on in chapter 22, which is after Abraham has been called to sacrifice his son Isaac, his beloved son Isaac, and then God stops him at the last minute and provides a ram to take Isaac's place.

And then the angel of the Lord says, in Genesis 22, 17 and 18, I will surely bless you, Abraham, and I will surely multiply your offspring as the stars of heaven and as the sand that is on the seashore.

And your offspring shall possess the gate of his enemies. And in your offspring shall all the nations of the earth be blessed, because you have obeyed my voice.

And these three passages, with basically saying more or less the same thing, can be regarded as the key to the whole message of the Bible.

[ 10 : 59 ] You see, in the beginning, God made the universe, and in that account of creation in Genesis 1 and 2, we read of God blessing his creation.

Creation was characterized by the blessing of God. It was fruitful. It was abundant. It was beautiful. It was very good. It was under God's blessing.

And then, the narrative of Genesis speaks of how the first humans, Adam and Eve, rebelled against God, their maker. Declared their independence, their autonomy from God.

And a consequence of that was the opposite of a blessing, which is a curse. In particular, God says to Adam, cursed is the ground because of you.

Later on, Cain, their son, murders his brother Abel, and he is under a curse for that. And so, the result of sin, of rebellion against God, is the opposite of a blessing.

[ 12 : 06 ] It is a curse. Now, that is limited by God's grace. It's not total, but there is still a curse on the creation and on human beings.

After the flood, there is a development of many nations and languages and peoples inhabiting the earth. And God selects this one man, Abraham, and announces his great plan, his great overarching purpose for the whole of humanity and the whole of world history.

And that plan is to undo the curse and to restore blessing. That it's through Abraham that all the families, all the nations of the world will be blessed.

So this is God's great plan. God's great overarching purpose for the world. God's mission statement.

Organizations often have mission statements, just a few words that say what the organization is about, what it's there for, what it's there to do.

[ 13 : 25 ] I've got a few examples here. Microsoft say that they're there to enable people and businesses throughout the world to realize their full potential. digital. The BBC's mission statement is to enrich people's lives with programs and services that inform, educate, and entertain.

Facebook, to give people the power to share and make the world more open and connected. Walmart, we save people money so they can live better.

The United Nations, peace, dignity, and equality on a healthy planet. And Free Church of Scotland, a healthy gospel church for every community in Scotland.

So all these different, very varied organizations have a mission statement, just a very pithy, short statement summarizing what they're about.

Well here we have God's mission statement in these three places and here in Genesis 18. God's mission statement is that through Abraham and ultimately through his offspring that all the nations of the earth will be blessed.

[ 14 : 42 ] Abraham himself would become a great and powerful nation and of course the history of the Bible records how the ancient Israelites that nation developed from Abraham's descendants.

But the purpose of Israel was never an end in itself. The purpose of Israel was that through them all nations would be blessed.

And ultimately that would come through Israel's Messiah, the offspring of Abraham the Lord Jesus Christ. In fact in Galatians chapter 3 Paul refers to this statement that we have three times in Genesis through Abraham all nations would be blessed.

And he describes it as the gospel preached beforehand to Abraham. So here we have the summary of the gospel. Blessing to all nations. But how would God fulfill that plan?

And we see that just spelled out, not fully but we see it spelled out to a certain extent here in verse 19. 13.

[ 15 : 53 ] And we have, it's like a rope with four strands that are kind of intertwined. There's election, ethics, family, and mission.

So first of all election. In verse 19 God says I have chosen Abraham. Abraham lived in a world where people might choose from any number of gods.

Or perhaps more likely be born into a family or tribe where that God was already chosen for you. The ancestors of the tribe had chosen their God, which God they would follow, and worshipped that God.

But by contrast, the true and living God had chosen Abraham. But second, we have ethics.

Because in verse 19, God says that I have chosen Abraham, and it's really, it's more emphatic than the translation we have here.

[ 17 : 05 ] I have chosen Abraham for the purpose that he may command his children and household after him to keep the way of the Lord by doing righteousness and justice.

Now, many people want their children to grow up doing what is good and right. People want their children to be taught the difference between right and wrong.

They want their children to be good people. Many people would say that. That was what they aspire for their children. Now, of course, there are different ideas in our own society and around the world as to what being good people might involve.

But many people would have that desire, that aspiration. Not so many, it seems, stop to ask, what do good and right mean?

Where do these notions come from? If it's merely what my society agrees is good and right, then that can shift over time. What is deemed good in one generation can be condemned by a succeeding generation.

[ 18 : 16 ] What is highly valued in one culture can be despised in another culture. And so that raises the question, are right and wrong and good and evil adrift on a sea tossed around by the waves of public opinion?

Or is there a firm anchor point for right and wrong and for good and evil? Well, Genesis 18 says that there is a firm anchor point and it's what it calls the way of the Lord.

And the way of the Lord is described here as doing righteousness and justice. You see, righteousness and justice are not just some sort of free-floating things.

They are based on the character and nature of God. God. God always does right. God always acts justly. He is the God of justice.

Human notions of right and just and of course, they are often twisted by sinfulness, but there is still a kind of, I think, in people everywhere, there is a notion of what is just and right and that is ultimately based on the character and nature of God, our maker.

[ 19 : 37 ] And God's justice and righteousness are illustrated in verses 20 and 21, where it says that, well, the Lord said, because the outcry against Sodom and Gomorrah is great and their sin is very grave, I will go down to see whether they have done altogether according to the outcry that has come to me.

Now, this word outcry is significant. It's the same word that is used of the Israelites crying out under the oppression of slavery in Egypt in Exodus chapter 2.

And it's used similarly in other parts of the Bible. And it suggests the outcry of the victims of the injustice and the oppression that is meted out by Sodom and Gomorrah.

Those maybe living in and around Sodom and Gomorrah. And we're told here that God hears that outcry, the cry of the victims, the cry of the oppressed.

And God goes down to see if what they have done is as bad as the outcry that has reached him. Does God need to do that? Well, no.

[ 20 : 55 ] God knows all things. God knows what goes on in and around Sodom and Gomorrah. But he goes down just to confirm, to be absolutely confirmed in that judgment.

And that itself emphasizes the justice and the fairness of God. As Abraham says later, that the judge of all the earth does what is right.

And so we see this example of the way of the Lord doing what is just and right. God living this side of the New Testament, we have a much greater insight into the way of the Lord than Abraham had.

Abraham lived at an early stage in the process of God revealing himself. We have much greater and fuller revelation living now after the time of Jesus Christ or in the time of Jesus Christ but after his coming to this world.

Matthew, Mark and Luke all begin the main part of their gospel quoting from Isaiah chapter 40 which says there's a voice calling in the wilderness prepare the way of the Lord.

[ 22 : 11 ] And each of them identifies that voice as John the Baptist. And it's clear from the movement of each gospel that the way of the Lord that John is announcing is the way of the Lord Jesus.

So for us today most of all keeping the way of the Lord in our lives is for our lives to be ever increasingly to become like that of the Lord Jesus.

The way of the Lord is supremely revealed and exemplified in the life of Jesus Christ. That is the way of the Lord. And so our lives are to be brought into conformity to the life of the Lord Jesus.

So there's ethics. And then there's family. Because again in verse 19 God has chosen Abraham for the purpose that he may command or direct his children and his household after him to keep the way of the Lord by doing what is right or righteousness and justice.

So it's not simply that Abraham as an individual is called to keep the way of the Lord. It's that he instructs his family, his children after him to do that.

[ 23 : 28 ] And of course that relates so closely to baptism that we are going to do shortly and to the promises that particularly parents but also the whole church will make in relation to baptism.

baptism. Now in the context of Genesis the immediately preceding chapter is chapter 17 God institutes circumcision as a sign of the covenant between God on the one hand and Abraham and his family on the other.

And all males born in Abraham's household were to receive the sign of the covenant, the sign of circumcision. And in Genesis chapter 18 verses 1 to 15 the Lord announces to Sarah and to Abraham the birth of the child of promise, the birth of Isaac.

So the purpose of God choosing Abraham is not simply just for Abraham to passively receive blessing from God.

Of course that is the huge part of it. But there's also a responsibility on Abraham's part to guide, to direct, to instruct, to command his children and household in the way of the Lord.

[ 25 : 01 ] And this is a vital part of biblical mission. The Bible presents mission as being across space and across time.

It's across space in that in the Old Testament but especially in the New Testament, the gospel of Jesus Christ goes to all nations. nations. But it's also through time because it's to be passed on from generation to generation.

Biblical mission doesn't end at home but it does begin at home. And it begins with teaching the next generation, teaching our children the way of the Lord.

Psalms 22, the end of that psalm, brings it out well. In verse 27 it says, all the ends of the earth will remember and turn to the Lord. And all the families of the nations will bow down before him.

For dominion belongs to the Lord and he rules over the nations. So that speaks of mission going out across the world to all the nations of the world. The news about the Lord.

[ 26 : 14 ] So that's mission across space. But then just a couple of verses later in verse 30 it says, posterity will serve him. Future generations will be told about the Lord.

They will proclaim his righteousness declaring to a people yet and born that he has done it. And that is mission through time. Mission being passed from generation to generation.

And so mission, biblical mission begins at home. Training children, training the next generation in the way of the Lord.

Sometimes believers can be so committed to church work or to mission work of some kind that they neglect their own families.

And that is a huge mistake. It is so vitally important to invest time with our children. children. At the end of the day, all the stuff I do, speaking personally, all the stuff I do in the church, in mission, someone else could do that.

[ 27 : 23 ] But only I can be a father to my children. I remember hearing the Irish Reformed Presbyterian preacher Ted Donnelly preaching and saying this.

He said, I never heard anyone at the end of their life saying that they wish they'd spent less time with their family. So, it's so important to teach children the way of the Lord, what the Lord requires, which is based on the Lord's own character of righteousness and justice.

And it's not just words. It involves modelling godly living, keeping the way of the Lord. Just the word way itself, it speaks of a path, of a road.

So, it's the whole of life. It's just the whole of, you know, we have the saying, don't we, that someone talks the talk, but do they walk the walk? And, you know, walking, the walk, is just your way of life.

It's what you do, how you behave, how you live your life. And so, keeping the way of the Lord, it's not just about verbal teaching, of course, it includes that, but it's about the whole of life, about teaching, by example, modelling godly living by example, which is so vital for children through reserve on a day-to-day basis.

[ 28 : 56 ] Well, the fourth thing, we've looked at election, or God's choosing, ethics, family, and finally, it's mission. And of course, these are all intertwined, so they've come up already.

So, mission, so in verse 18, sorry, verse 19, God says, and it's literally, for I have chosen him for the purpose that he may command his children and his household after him to keep the way of the Lord by doing righteousness and justice for the purpose that the Lord may bring to Abraham what he has promised him.

And the promise is stated in verse 18, that Abraham will certainly become a great and powerful nation, and through him, or in him, all the nations of the earth will be blessed.

And so, ethics, family, mission, are all intertwined. By following the way of the Lord, Israel, the descendants of Abraham, ancient Israel, was meant to be a blessing to other nations.

There was to be a kind of an attractational nature to their way of life, in walking in the way of the Lord. That's brought out in Deuteronomy chapter 4, verses 6 and 8, where it says that the Israelites are commanded, observe God's decrees and laws carefully, for this will show your wisdom and understanding to the nations, who will hear about all these decrees and say, surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people.

[ 30 : 44 ] What other nation is so great as to have their gods near them, the way the Lord our God is near us, whenever we pray to him? And what other nation is so great as to have such righteous decrees and laws, as this body of laws I am setting before you today?

So you see what's being said there, that if the Israelites keep the laws of God, the way of God, the way of the Lord, that will stand out.

People will notice, other nations around them will notice that and will be attracted to ask about their way of life and particularly about their God. And the same principle is taught and indeed it's amplified in the New Testament.

We think of Jesus' words in the Sermon on the Mount, in Matthew 5, verse 16, where Jesus tells his disciples, let your light shine before others so that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven.

And so again, it's that attractational thing that people are to observe our lives and to see just the goodness, the beauty of our lives and be drawn from Deuteronomy to ask questions about our God and in Matthew to glorify our Father in heaven.

[ 32 : 08 ] And so a very strong element in biblical mission is just that attractational, the attractational nature of lives that show beauty and goodness because they are following the way of the Lord.

Now, of course, it is vital to speak the good news. The New Testament uses many verbs of speech and it talks about proclaiming the good news of Jesus, of preaching, telling, discussing, dialoguing, announcing, bringing good news.

And that's vital. And for us, at the very least, it means identifying ourselves with Jesus Christ as his followers. others. But the Bible also emphasizes the role of the whole of life.

Not only our words, but our deeds. We are to do good deeds. We are to keep the way of the Lord by doing righteousness and justice. And to teach our children in that way.

And under God, that will be a means of drawing others to our God and to the blessing that comes through Jesus Christ.

[ 33 : 20 ] Our aim in living lives of such quality is not to draw attention to ourselves, but to glorify our heavenly Father and his Son, Jesus Christ, and the Holy Spirit.

Spirit. And what Dumfries and Dumfriesshire and Scotland and the world needs is to see families and fellowships that in their whole lives keep the way of the Lord by doing righteousness and justice.

And to be drawn to our Lord through that and to receive the blessing promised to Abraham, the blessing that is for all nations through Abraham's offspring, Jesus Christ.

May God bless his word to us.